

BECKLEY POST HERALD REGISTER (W. VA.)
20 DECEMBER 1982

Official leak

Sen. Robert Byrd is absolutely right in having condemned the Defense Department for its leak of sensitive, classified information to the press in a recent effort to promote the Reagan administration's defense policy.

Byrd was furious that much of the information he read in Washington newspapers was identical that that he received in a super-secret briefing previously by the Defense Department.

"I recall on that occasion how seriously we took the restrictions which were imposed upon us with respect to secrecy," Byrd said. "The doors to the (Senate) chamber were sealed shut, virtually all of our staff experts were excluded, admonitions were read to members of this body, and, I dare say, as far as I have been able to determine, not one single word from that briefing was ever disclosed to anyone outside this chamber.

"And now we pick up the morning paper and read that much of that same information was given to the press."



Byrd...furious

Sen. Byrd is justified in feeling outraged.

Selective leaking is a game which has been played before — and in one instance, it was thoroughly deplored by the Reagan administration.

To enhance his campaign, President Jimmy Carter, running for reelection, revealed that the U.S. was making progress in the development of the Stealth warplane, an aircraft which is being designed so that it will be practically invisible on enemy radar screens.

Ronald Reagan accused Carter of sacrificing national security for the sake of political gain.

Now Ronald Reagan and his Defense Department have sacrificed national security for the sake of preserving it. That's a curious development.

The government has a right to keep secrets. But if information is classified, it should be treated in the appropriate manner consistently. The restrictions shouldn't be broken for tactical and transitory gains in the appropriations process.

If we are to have no secrets, then the CIA should publish its own daily newspaper and spread the juicy stuff out for all to see and peruse.

President Reagan should play the classified information game by the rules.

There should be no expedient official leaking of secrets.

In the past, members of Congress too often have been the culprits. Congress has a reputation of not being able to keep intelligence secrets.

Now it appears that the same failing is shared by the White House.